

I strongly disagree with the idea of granting Technician class licensees instant access to the HF spectrum without further testing. When the same theory test was required for both Technician and General, there were far more questions dealing with HF propagation found on the test than are there now. Today's Technician class operators are more oriented toward VHF and FM repeaters and do not understand how HF propagation is different. For example, I once had a conversation on a repeater with someone who was explaining the number of repeater links that had to be operating in order for him to talk to his father in law in another part of the state. I suggested he try 75 meters. He responded that he was a no code Technician, and "Do you think 75 meters can reach down there?"

While Morse Code may not be used by other services, the amateur radio service is not like the other services. Unlike other radio services, the amateur radio service is not only frequency agile, but mode agile as well. Morse Code is the second most popular mode on the HF bands. In a survey by the American Radio Relay League just a few years ago, nearly 60% of the respondents said they use code at least 50% of their time on the radio. Nearly 25% of the respondents said Morse Code is the only mode they operate on HF. Saying code is not used anymore is a generalization.

Many aircraft navigation aides use Morse Code at about 5 to 7 words per minute for identification. Pilots are required to positively identify the navigational aide before using it for navigation. While the navigational charts do have the dots and dashes on the chart to help pilots decode what they are hearing, the process is much smoother if the pilot understands Morse Code. I have taught several pilots Morse Code in a few sessions enough to be able to understand the identifications. Three of them went on to become licensed amateurs and found the code to be very easy.

It is true that many of the no code Technicians do not upgrade. Take a look at the large number of people who became amateurs in 1991 when the Morse Code requirement was dropped for the Technician license. Many of those people are not active, and have let their licenses lapse because they lost interest. Perhaps they were never very interested to begin with. By comparison, many active Technician class licensees have upgraded. They receive encouragement from other amateurs by hearing about HF, and making the commitment to upgrade.

By the very nature of a test, it is supposed to be stressful. However, if the applicant is well prepared, the 5 word per minute code test is not a problem. With all the emphasis on Homeland Security, and emergency communications, do we really want to depend on somebody who could not pass a test because they thought it was too stressful to be the same person to pass an emergency piece of traffic out of a stricken area? I agree that passing a code test is not going to help someone to pass traffic in an emergency, but if they find a code test too stressful, an emergency situation may be too much.

Administration of code tests is not a burden to the VECs or VE teams. The claim that administering code exams requires special equipment is grossly exaggerated. Computer programs can generate practice tests in a few seconds. However the VE team chooses to administer the exam is totally up to them. Most laptop computers can generate audio loud enough for a small group to hear the code. If the VE team chooses to use tapes provided by the their VEC, the only "special" equipment needed is a boombox. These can be obtained from any neighborhood Radio Shack store. Grading the exams is no different than grading the written tests.

The argument that code testing is keeping out potentially excellent operators is a weak one. The amateur service is nearly three times the size it was when I became licensed in 1979. Again, I point to the large influx of people who entered the ranks when code was dropped as a requirement for the Technician license. NCVEC has not proved that the large numbers of "potentially excellent operators" they expect to join the amateur service will actually spend time on the air. If history repeats itself, we will see a very large group of people become amateur radio operators, spend a little bit of time on the air, and eventually lose interest because chances are they were not really interested to begin with. People tend to place a higher value on something they have to work for. Unfortunately, NCVEC has caved into the people who don't want to work for an amateur license.

While the World Administrative Radio Conference has dropped code as a requirement for an amateur license, it did leave the requirement up to the individual country. While there are some countries dropping code as a requirement, the vast majority have not. If the United States drops a code requirement, US amateurs will face the prospect of not being able to operate in a foreign country on a reciprocal license because that country still requires code for full operating privileges. The best a no-code amateur with HF privileges from the US can operate in the foreign country will be that country's version of our Technician license. The US should be setting the world standard, not falling to it.

I strongly disagree with this proposal. Morse code should continue to be a requirement for some amateur radio licenses in the US.